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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003470

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SUNNI RELIGIOUS LEADER WANTS FEDERALISM AMENDED  
FOR SUNNI ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONSTITUTION

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: At an August 24 meeting with PolOff, the influential former Sunni Waqf (Endowment) leader, Adnan Dulaimi, urged the U.S. to ensure either the removal or the watering down of references to federalism in the draft constitution. Otherwise, he said, Sunnis would not support the text. Dulaimi said that the President's August 23 statement welcoming the new constitution would lead many Sunnis to conclude that they have to choose between either federalism or violence. PolOff strongly countered that the Sunnis should instead pursue their constitutional objectives through peaceful negotiations with other Iraqi communities. End Summary.

2. (C) Dulaimi pressed for U.S. "intervention" to either delete all mention of federalism from the draft constitution or to make the text sufficiently vague in order to postpone a clear definition of the concept. According to Dulaimi, "Sunnis hate the word 'federalism' because they believe it will separate Iraq." PolOff told Dulaimi that Sunni leaders should discuss their concerns directly with the Shi'a and Kurds.

3. (C) Dulaimi said that U.S. expressions of support for the new constitution, particularly as expressed by the President August 23, had made the climate more difficult for talks among Iraq's three communities. He said the U.S. position has led Sunnis to conclude that they had to choose between federalism and violence. PolOff countered that Dulaimi should make every effort to press for peaceful Sunni dialogue with other communities.

4. (C) Dulaimi argued that opposition to federalism extends beyond Sunnis to members of all communities who are concerned about Iran's growing influence in southern Iraq. He warned that "Iran wants to export the Shia revolution to Iraq with clerics ruling the government." Dulaimi claimed that a group of like-minded Iraqis from all communities (Shia and Sunni, Arab and Kurd) would hold a conference in Baghdad, September 3, in order to call for a rejection of "federalism".

5. (C) COMMENT: Several of our Sunni Arab contacts on August 24 noted that the Arab media's spin on the President's August 23 remarks concerning the Iraqi constitution had made negotiations harder. The general thrust of the President's remarks, as reported in papers such as Sharq al-Awsat and the BBC Arabic service, was that the President had said that Sunni Arabs should either accept the draft constitution or face living with more violence. We are sharing the actual text of the President's remarks with Sunni Arab contacts to show the media spin here was quite wrong. Dulaimi's effort to blame the U.S. for the Sunni position on the constitution -- and even violence -- is self-serving. However, he has remained an influential figure among many Iraqi Sunnis, and we will be trying to get him to take a moderate and constructive stance. Getting Sunni Arabs like Dulaimi to support the draft will be hard, but would pay benefits in terms of broadening support for the political process and undercutting Sunni Arab community support for violence.

Khalilzad